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Dialogue and Closer Association in Southern Africa

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The Outward Movement in South Africa's foreign relations was launched by Prime Minister Leabua Jonathan's visit to Pretoria on 3 September 1966, the first made by the leader of an independent African nation to the Republic. Lesotho's willingness to discuss matters of common interest marked the beginning of what many white South Africans hoped would become an ever-expanding circle of constructive dialogue and mutual understanding between African states and themselves. Some signal advances were made over the next five years: the Malawi trade agreement of March 1967, the acceptance of technical and economic assistance by the former High Commission Territories, the vote of six African states in favour of dialogue at the Addis Ababa summit of June 1971, and Dr Banda's much publicized state visit to South Africa. The Vorster administration speeded up the implementation of 'positive' apartheid in the Republic itself, developing the political and economic infrastructure of the so-called Bantu Homelands as an outlet for African aspirations.

South Africa in the 1960s is the subject of two works, one by Marquard* and the other a collection of essays edited by Rhodie*, and is the principal focus of a third work, a series of essays edited by Potholm and Dale, which appeared shortly before the Outward Movement began to lose momentum. Marquard's monograph, written by one of the Republic's leading historians, is a plea for Southern African federation on liberal lines. The other works are collections of essays spanning a wide cross-section of political views on the affairs of the sub-continent, although the range of opinion expressed in the Johannesburg publication is naturally more limited. The editors give reasons for the choice of symposium format in their respective forewords: Potholm and Dale refer to the lack in existing literature of a balanced presentation of the differing and often antago-

nistic views of African nationalist spokesmen, government officials and scholars on the politics of Southern Africa' (p.vii), while Rhoodie offers his collection as a dialogue between local contributors covering a wide spectrum of political views. Laudable aims, certainly; but there are major flaws in both works. Essays are variable in quality, often amounting to nothing more than mere statements of official policy or exercises in polemic better suited to the documentary history. Rhoodie musters together an impressive gathering of local contributors, including inter alia three government ministers, leaders of the two principal Opposition parties, four prominent non-white political personalities and the leader of the Liberal Party (disbanded in May 1968), Alan Paton. Unfortunately, an undoubted virtue in Rhoodie's approach has become a vice. There are too many short essays on similar topics, with consequent irritating repetition, and the value of the symposium would have been enhanced if there had been half as many contributors writing at slightly greater length and depth.

Relations between the Bantustans and the 'white' area of South Africa proper are discussed in some detail, but the early colonial background is presented with a degree of bias in Rhoodie and largely overlooked by contributors to Part Two of Potholin and Dale. The essays by C. J. Jooste (Director, SABRA) and J. H. Coetzee are re-statements of the Afrikaner interpretation of South African history. Coetzee's contribution to Rhoodie's volume even perpetuates the myth that Bantu tribes arrived some time after the Dutch settlement at the Cape (pp. 131-3). In this connection, it is interesting to note that even the pro-Government African Institute does not accept this discredited thesis: a map issued in 1967 shows the Bantu in occupation of the Transvaal, Natal, the Transkei and most of the Orange Free State by 1650.

Jooste's contribution betrays further historical distortions. He plays down the factor of Boer expansionism during the nineteenth century, and attributes the race structure inherited by the Malan government to the legacy of British forward imperialism. Concerning the Trekboers, he remarks: 'The conquest of peoples was foreign to them. Their approach was to occupy vacant land and to leave the Bantu peoples to govern themselves in their respective national territories' (pp.4-5). This is at best a half-truth. The Mfecane had admittedly resulted in relatively depopulated areas in the Orange Free State with the withdrawal of tribes such as the Sotho and their associates to more readily defensible positions, but Jooste stretches the reader's credulity to breaking point when he implies an element of continuity between the Trekkers' early African policy and the modern Bantu Homelands concept. President Kruger's practice of allocating small locations for the occupation of Africans, subject to their good behaviour (referred to in G. Jacobs' essay, p.152), was designed to safeguard Boer security and furnish labour supplies: it cannot be interpreted as evidence of an early Afrikaner commitment to the Homelands principle.

Following the crucial Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act (1959), the Homelands became the principal focus of the Republic's policy towards Africans, in response to rising international condemnation of apartheid. This policy, based on the assumption that the Homelands are self-contained nation-states in embryo, is set out in the official contributions of C. P. Mulder and M. C. Botha to Rhoodie's collection. The ideology of apartheid emphasised the historic ethnic differences between South Africa's major tribal groupings, an approach which gained apparent post hoc justification from later events in Black Africa such as the Nigerian Civil War. It received an adventitious boost from Britain's grant of independence to the High Commission territories, two of which were ethnic states. While it is unwise to gloss over the problem of 'tribalism' in African politics, as Hamutenya and Geingob have done in their contribution to Potholin and Dale (p.88), Hellman's trenchant observations in Rhoodie's collection (pp. 20-6) of this aspect of South African Separate Development are very much to the point:

Elsewhere in Africa, the newly independent nations are struggling to subdue tribalism and to develop an over-riding national unity within their arbitrarily defined borders. But in South Africa the national South African consciousness that was developing is deliberately being undermined and a fading tribalism is being revitalised. If divide and rule is the final objective, then success is undoubtedly being achieved.

Compartmentalisation of the African
majority into so-called ‘Black Nations’ has a
definite psychological advantage for South
Africa’s Whites in that it provides the illusion
of near numerical equality between the ‘White
Nation’ and each of these areas: according to
Jooste’s table (pp.5-6), the only Bantustan
which exceeds the European population of the
White area is Kwazulu. However, the Homelands
policy is fraught with potentially embarras-
sing problems for the Republic which might,
given the right circumstances, destroy
the ideological facade of Separate Develop-
ment and induce a return to the naked baaskapism
of the Malan-Strijdom era. Bantustan leaders
such as Chief Kaiser Matanzima of the Trans-
kei, and Gatsha Buthelezi of Kwazulu, a con-
tributor to the Rhoodie volume, have learnt
not only the rhetoric of apartheid but also
to take advantage of their symbiotic relation-
ship with Pretoria to demand more intensive
development and the restoration of ancestral
lands. Banton’s prediction that Matanzima’s
electoral victory of 1963 would ultimately lead
to a dilemma for the Department of Bantu
Administration far deeper and much less tractable than any which might conceivably
arise from the victory of his integrationist rival
Victor Poto appears to have been vindicated
by recent events. In February 1973, a meeting
to discuss Homeland independence held be-
tween Vorster, Buthelezi and Matanzima
reached deadlock when the two African leaders
refused to accept any further constitutional
advance until more land was added to their
areas.7 The impending extension of Black
Africa’s frontiers to the northern boundary of
Kwazulu adds a new, possibly disturbing,
element to the relationship between the Bantu-
stsans and Pretoria. In this context, Jacobs’
reference (p.163) to the homelands as potential
‘Cubas’ is likely to win more sympathy from
the white electorate than it did when it ap-
ppeared in the United Party platform for the
1966 election.

The move towards political devolution in
the Bantustans has been accompanied by an
extended dialogue on a possible association
of states to embrace not only a Republic par-
titioned between Black and White but also the
former High Commission Territories and
possibly some of its northern neighbours.
Several contributors to the works under review
have taken Dr Verwoerd’s ‘common market’
speech of 1961 as the starting point, but the
policy is of much earlier provenance. The con-
cept of a South African commonwealth com-
prising a federation of component ethnic groups
was put forward in a SABRA policy state-
ment issued in 1952. It was developed further
in Rhoodie and Venter’s now classic work on
apartheid philosophy published in 1959.9

Historical evidence shows that interest in
closer association, based on the extension of
political control, had been a significant theme
at various stages after unification. The 1910
Act of Union itself had facilitated eventual
Afrikaner political and ideological dominance
over the country as a whole, while the award
of a mandate over South West Africa, captured
by Union soldiers in 1915, had given Pretoria
virtual sovereignty over an adjacent territory.
According to the late Richard Meinertzhagen,
South African forces serving in the East Afri-
can campaign had hoped that German East
Africa would be granted to South Africa as
well.10 General Smuts’ offer to the Southern
Rhodesian electorate in 1922 and his later vision
of a ‘great African Dominion stretching un-
broken throughout Africa’11 were further mani-
festations of South African sub-imperialism
under the British aegis.

It is interesting to note that, at this stage,
Smuts’ Afrikaner opponents strongly con-
demned his ‘outward movement’, feeling that
it would strengthen the Imperial tie and expose
South Africa to the swaart gevaar from the
North. No such reservations were expressed in
the case of the High Commission Territories,
which, though black, were regarded by all
parties alike as an integral part of South Africa
and sooner or later destined for incorporation.
Thus Afrikaner nationalists were in the fore-
front of the fifty-year struggle (see J. P. Stevens’
contribution to Potholm and Dale) with Britain
over the issue of their absorption. The pro-
tracted debate ended only in 1962, when Ver-
woerd evidently decided that South Africa’s
objective could be achieved by economic means.

Verwoerd’s change of heart over the future
of these territories and the commencement
of the Outward Movement in general was in-
duced by Britain’s rapid decolonisation of her
dependencies in the early sixties, a process
which threatened to isolate the Republic. While
it was militarily secure for the foreseeable
future, the outward movement provided a
valuable psychological crutch to an administra-
tion that wished to regain international res-
pectability after adverse reactions to the Sharpeville massacre and its implementation of petty apartheid measures.

In character, the outward policy of Verwoerd and Vorster has been naturally quite different from that of their predecessors forty to fifty years before. The stridently anti-colonial tone of international politics precluded any proposal involving the extension of sovereignty, however limited — indeed, South West Africa (Namibia) became the Achilles heel of the outward movement, despite the breathing-space given South Africa after the International Court of Justice’s surprising judgment of July 1966 — and in practice, the Republic’s endeavours have been in the fields of Dialogue, economic assistance and co-operation. Several schemes have been put forward by South African experts: one such, comprising an economic community covering the sub-continent south of Zaire and Tanzania, is discussed in Eschel Rhoodie’s contribution to Potholm and Dale.

A further outline, involving a measure of South African control over its neighbours, is set out at length in Marquard’s A Federation of Southern Africa. The author argues eloquently for a federal association between South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana and possibly South West Africa (Namibia) to stem what he terms the drift towards ‘stagnation or to a collision between white and non-white’ (p.1). However attractive his liberal treatise may seem to those hopeful of a just and peaceful solution to South Africa’s racial problems, it shows little regard for present-day realities. For reasons discussed more fully below, it is difficult to foresee either the black states of Southern Africa agreeing to surrender a moiety of their sovereignty to a federation which would be dominated economically if not politically by the white regions, or the United Nations approving the inclusion of South West Africa (Namibia). Marquard’s federal proposal rests on the further assumption that a drastic liberation of apartheid should be made, including inter alia the possible political inclusion of Coloureds and Indians in the white regions (p.4), free movement of African labourers (p.98), by implication, the augmentation of Bantustans (p.71) and the release of non-white political detainees prior to a constitutional conference (p.131). If these are to be prerequisites for federation, it is unlikely that the Marquard plan will be realised in the near future; moreover, one doubts whether the former High Commission Territories and the United Nations would consider them adequate.

There has been a tendency for observers to overstress the central role of economic and geopolitical factors when discussing relations between the former High Commission Territories and South Africa: Weisfelder, one of the contributors to Potholm and Dale (pp.125-140) has couched his essay in such a framework. However, a thesis based solely on these elements is much too limited. Three other factors must be taken into account: the lingering memory of South African expansionism, outlined above; the related hatred of apartheid, which has at times overridden economic and geographical considerations; and the unpredictable personality factor of certain black African leaders.

The deterioration of relations between Lesotho, significantly the most dependent of states in the sub-continent, and South Africa after 1971 affords an apt illustration of these factors. In October, 1971, Chief Jonathan launched a strong attack on Separate Development at Lesotho’s fifth anniversary celebrations, and intervened to prevent the visit of an Ivory Coast representative to Pretoria for talks on Dialogue. His Minister of Foreign Affairs declared Lesotho’s support for African guerrillas at a conference of non-aligned states held in Guyana during August 1972. Two further events, Lesotho’s vote against South Africa in the United Nations sanctions debate of November, 1972, and Chief Jonathan’s spontaneous outburst at the time of the Carletonville shootings further demonstrate that a model of Lesotho-South African relations based solely on the ‘hostage theory’, is inadequate to meet all circumstances. It remains to be seen whether the recent accord reported between Chief Jonathan and Vorster has really healed this widening ideological breach.

Moving north from the Southern African heartland, the personality factor in regional politics is exemplified further by the strange case of Malawi, whose links with South Africa are not entirely explicable in economic terms. The internal split between Dr Banda and his ‘Young Turks’ over a number of issues including (according to Speck in Potholm and Dale, p.211) relations with the white south reflected the common political dichotomy amongst older and younger nationalists; a similar feature may be discerned in Banda’s distrust of his more
ideological contemporaries in Zambia and Tanzania.

Regional politics in Southern Africa have moved into a period of extreme uncertainty since the publication of the works under review. Apart from the manifest tension between the Republic and some of its enclave states, noted earlier, and the continued Rhodesian stalemate which has in turn contributed to the failure of Pretoria's approaches to Lusaka, the Portuguese coup of April 1974 has injected a more fluid element into the body politic of the sub-continent. Potholm's remark that 'Mozambique is in many ways the key swing unit in the sub-system of Southern Africa' (p.150) is no longer a mere academic speculation. Portugal's abrupt decision to de-colonise its overseas possessions has drawn attention to the now self-evident factor, under-rated in Potholm's projection (p.324), of metropolitan Portugal in Southern African regional politics. It remains to be seen whether, as in the instance of Zambia's decision to keep its border with Rhodesia closed, ideology rather than economic self-interest will determine the future pattern of inter-state relations in Southern Africa.

**References**

1 Gabon, Ivory Coast, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi and Mauritius. Five other nations abstained.
3 See *Bulletin of the Africa Institute of South Africa*, 1974, 5, iii, cover.
15 Prospects of a détente between Zambia and South Africa brightened at the time this review was being written, with a speech by the South African Prime Minister, *The Senate of the Republic of South Africa, Debates, First Session, Fourth Senate*, cc.3335-46, 23.x.1974. The cooling of relations between Zambia and Tanzania over increased railage costs on copper may have been a contributory factor to this new development.